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ABSTRACT

This article describes the staffing, operation and evolution of a crisis intervention network at a medium-sized university in the San Francisco Bay Area. The training and duties of resident assistants, hall directors, campus police, crisis intervention resource personnel, and hospital psychiatrist are described. Specific topics addressed include differential responses to crisis-based or client demographic variables and maintenance of the crisis intervention and prevention network. Conflict areas and organizational problems such as maintaining confidentiality, defining areas of responsibility, and obtaining funding are described. Training aimed at prevention as well as intervention is emphasized throughout the materials. (Author/JAC)

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A DIFFERENTIAL USE OF RESOURCES IN PREVENTION AND CRISIS INTERVENTION

by

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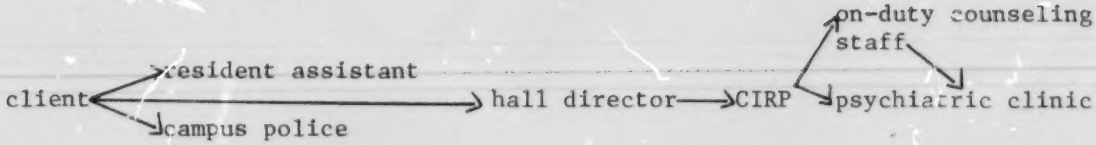
In an effort to provide support for students experiencing psychological crises during the evenings and on weekends, the staff of the counseling services at a medium sized private university in the San Francisco Bay Area, in conjunction with the residence hall staff and the campus police, have developed a crisis intervention network. Since its inception two years ago, members of the network have responded to diverse crises, ranging from suicidal and homicidal thoughts and behavior, to psychotic breaks, acute anxiety attacks, rape trauma, and hysterical acting out. The network serves the entire student population of approximately 5000, one fourth of whom live in residence halls.

The crisis intervention network utilizes a variety of staff members, whose counseling training and experience and amount of direct contact with students differs widely. The network members include counseling services staff, a crisis intervention resource person (CIRP), residence hall directors and resident assistants, campus police officers, and an off-campus psychiatric clinic staff. On the dimensions of experience and student contact, the counseling services staff (Ph.D. and M.A. level psychologists and counselors) has a high degree of clinical expertise, but only a moderate amount of contact with students, based on self-referrals, consultation and outreach efforts. One member of the staff, designated as the coordinator of crisis intervention services, is responsible for monitoring the network, making sure that the various parts of the system are communicating clearly and that crises are being resolved effectively. In addition, staff members rotate on-call duty via pager for crises occurring in the evenings and on weekends. The second arm of the network, the CIRP, is a masters level counselor living in one of the residence halls. The CIRP provides crisis coverage for resident students when the counseling service is closed. This

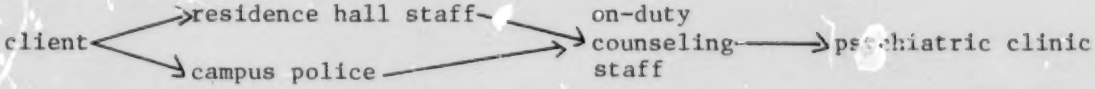
person, who has significant training in counseling and crisis intervention, potentially has a moderately high degree of exposure to students given the CIRP's presence in the residence hall. The residence hall staff, consisting of student hall directors and resident assistants, have no formal clinical training but have the greatest daily exposure to students. The hall directors (H.D.'s) are responsible for administrative duties and supervision of the resident assistants (R.A.'s) in their respective halls. In turn, the R.A.'s maintain the smooth running of the halls and develop a sense of community among students. The fourth arm of the network, the campus police officers, have no clinical training and relatively little daily exposure to students. However, they do have a high degree of contact with students in crisis, since they provide emergency first aid, transportation to hospitals and physical restraint for acting out behavior. They are also the liaison with the SFPD. The final piece of the network, the local psychiatric clinic staff, has a high degree of clinical expertise. While they have little contact with students on a regular basis, the clinic staff is invaluable to the system, since it provides psychiatric assessment and medication as well as hospitalization and long term intensive therapy when necessary.

When a crisis occurs, the network's response depends upon the client's resident and student status. If the client is a resident student, the hall director is notified (by the client, the resident advisor, campus police, etc.) and the hall director contacts the CIRP for assistance, if necessary. The CIRP has the option of responding to the crisis alone, or calling the on-duty counseling services staff for back-up consultation via pager. Either the CIRP or the counseling services staff person may contact the psychiatric

clinic for assistance.



If the client is a non-resident student or a non-student, residence hall staff or campus police may contact the counseling staff directly via pager for consultation, and the on-duty staff member again has the option of contacting the psychiatric clinic.



In order to maintain open communication within the network, a number of formal and informal meetings regularly occur. The coordinator of crisis intervention services consults weekly with the CIRP to discuss current crises and clarify the resolution and follow-up of previous incidents. The coordinator also has weekly meetings with the assistant director of residential life who supervises the entire residence hall staff (H.D.'s and R.A.'s). During these meetings, they discuss issues such as follow-up planning, which may not have been sufficiently dealt with at the time of the crisis. One counseling services staff person functions as a liaison to the campus police, meeting informally with officers on an as-needed basis. Finally, the entire counseling services staff meets once or twice annually with the directors of the inpatient and outpatient services at the psychiatric clinic to discuss the relationship between the two systems.

In addition to providing crisis intervention services as part of the network, the counseling services staff is also involved in training. Yearly seminars are conducted with the residence hall staff to familiarize

them with basic assessment of suicidal potential, brief crisis intervention techniques, and referral strategies. Throughout the year residence hall staff receive further training workshops in areas such as stress reduction and coping with grief and loss. Similar presentations have also been developed for campus police officers, and the number of workshops requested by this office continues to increase.

While the crisis network is currently a viable and important part of the university community, it is still in the early stages of development and continues to evolve in response to problems generated within the network and to changes in the university system. The first problem area could be called "too many cooks," and refers to situations in which all five parts of the network have some involvement with the person(s) in crisis. In these instances it is not only difficult to coordinate input, but also each of the five groups often feel that they are uniquely qualified to help the individual(s) in crisis and that they should be "in charge." The tact and persistence of the crisis coordinator sometimes helps but does not eliminate this issue. A second issue associated with the number and variety of people forming the network concerns the meaning and limits of confidentiality. The residence hall and campus police staffs are neither familiar with nor bound by the strict guidelines observed by the counseling services staff. As a result, they sometimes feel personally rebuffed when a counselor either does not volunteer or refuses information about a client with whom they have been involved. To cope with this problem, the members of the network are making an increasing effort to openly acknowledge that confidentiality is a sensitive issue, the counselors share their guidelines at training workshops, and

they try to remain more aware of staff conflicts related to confidentiality that may arise during crises. Funding has been an additional source of stress. The crisis intervention resource person has traditionally been funded by the office of residential life but is supervised by the crisis coordinator from the counseling services. Thus the existence of the CIRP has been dependent upon the awareness, goodwill and budget of a non-counseling oriented group. While this shared responsibility was intended to strengthen the alliance between residential life and counseling services, at times it has led to a confusion of loyalty and responsibility for the CIRP. To alleviate this problem, the CIRP will in the future be staffed by a doctoral level intern affiliated with the counseling services. The CIRP will have regular consultation meetings with the hall directors and their staffs, rather than consultation on a crisis only basis. While not a problem, a university change which has affected the network this year is the switch from student hall directors to professional directors with masters degrees in student personnel or related fields. In their first year the professionals have brought increased expertise and openness to their positions and have had more time to devote to prevention and crisis management. A final factor which inhibits the effective functioning of the network is the stigma attached to counseling and the lack of awareness of many residence hall staff and campus police officers about the role counseling can play in preventing or ameliorating crises. While training and repeated contact with counselors during the year increases the level of trust and understanding, rapid turnover in housing and public safety staffs

compounds the problem.

In summary, this crisis intervention network relies for its effectiveness on the cooperation of five highly divergent types of professionals. The primary responsibility of the network continues to be crisis intervention but also encompasses training for prevention. At this point in its development the network is frequently changing in response both to internal pressures and to university-wide decisions. Despite these growing pains the crisis intervention network has maintained its identity and continues to meet some critical and sensitive needs of the university community.